The Pacer

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The Independent Voice of the University of Tennessee at Martin

# UT Martin campus housing shortage leaves students scrambling

Keenan Wilson | Pacer Staff

Many students at the University of Tennessee at Martin were forced to scramble for a place to live this fall as enrollment surged to record levels and campus housing availability reached new lows.

For the last four years, the number of students living on campus has risen consistently, as has overall enrollment. The campus had an occupancy of 87% for the fall 2024 semester. This semester, however, on-campus housing is in short supply.

"[The campus] is definitely over 99% occupancy. Right now, we have two male spaces and seven female spaces is all we have at the moment," said Ryan Martin, Director of Housing at the University of Tennessee in Martin. "We are pretty close to being as full as we can go."

In previous years, students could request to relocate or switch roommates within a designated time period following move-in. With an occupancy rate so high, that was not possible this fall.

"I was the first person to meet with my housing director," said Gavin Boatman, a sophomore Mechanical Engineering major, who tried to move during the moving period. "[The hall director] called Browning first, they said it was nothing, called Ellington, they said it was nothing, not even private rooms, called Arnold Pryor and they put me on a wait list because they had nothing available. Cooper wasn't even an option for me to move to. They told me there was nothing they could do… They sent out an email at the end of the week and told me that my request couldn't be filled."

Simultaneously, the university used the local Hampton Inn to house returning students for the first week of school. As incoming freshmen are required to live on campus, all of the newest 1,329 Skyhawks were placed before any returning upperclassmen who did not submit their intent to return forms by the deadline.

"We used the hotel for temporary overflow… and by the time we got to the end of the first week, there were down to just three guys that were there and they were able to find off-campus housing," Martin said. "It was called the Standby Program, so it was like we'll pay for your hotel standby if you wanted to give it a little buffer room to find off campus or wait to see if a room opens up after move in."

The campus held 45 beds at the Hampton Inn for the Standby Program. However, of the students to whom the offer to stay was extended, only about 20 accepted the offer, according to Martin. By the end of the week, 17 of the 20 students secured on-campus housing, while the other 3 secured off-campus housing, he said.

The campus has a max bed total of 2,042. Currently, approximately 2,000 students live on campus. Over 50 percent of the beds filled are freshmen.

"It's a very delicate numbers game and I know housing has done a good job with that," said UT Martin Assistant Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs & Dean of Students John Abel. "I know housing is working extremely hard to meet everybody's needs."

Browning Hall on Sep. 13, 2025. ***(Pacer Photo/ Miranda Conrad)***

Abel said the best way to guarantee housing and make the process easier is to check your email and, when the housing form comes through, complete the application before the deadline.

Browning Hall will be demolished during the summer of 2026, and the campus will lose around 300 beds. As a solution, the Office of Residence Life and Housing plans to make the first floor of Arnold Pryor Place into double-occupancy rooms that will have a price relative to the current price of private rooms in Ellington Hall ($2,809). They also plan to revert some of the private rooms in Ellington into double-occupancy, still leaving the campus short 170 beds.

That, however, is not the only thing housing is doing to make up the difference. Starting next semester, the Office of Residence Life and Housing hopes to complete the program set up to help students find housing in the nearby area. Students will have the option to apply for off-campus housing through a new section within the Housing Portal that will direct them to an external website featuring a listing of available rentals nearby.

"I would like it to have it to where the spring, we can have it up and running with listings that people can start looking at before we get to the March 31 deadline," Martin said.

# Professor Hamlyn marches her way into UT Martin

Ethan Tanner | Pacer Staff

A passion for music seems to be in the blood of the new director of the Aviators Marching Band.

Professor Emily Hamlyn, from Hendersonville, TN, is the newest professor in the UT Martin music department and director of the Aviators Marching Band.

Hamlyn was introduced to music at a very young age. Both of her parents were music educators during her childhood, paving the way to the job she has today.

"Since day one, it's kind of always been assumed, you know, 'you're going to go on and when you're in college...no matter what your major is, you're going to continue to have a love of music through your whole life,'" Hamlyn said.

Before ultimately settling on a career in Music Education, Hamlyn considered majoring in Chemical Engineering.

See HAMLYN (pg 3) for continued story.

Professor Emily Hamlyn directs the UTM Aviators Marching Band on Tuesday, Sept. 9, 2025. ***(Pacer Photo / Chloe Kent)***

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HAWK SPOT! now on page 2

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3:00 A.M.
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AHHHHH!!
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Power off
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Seek Truth

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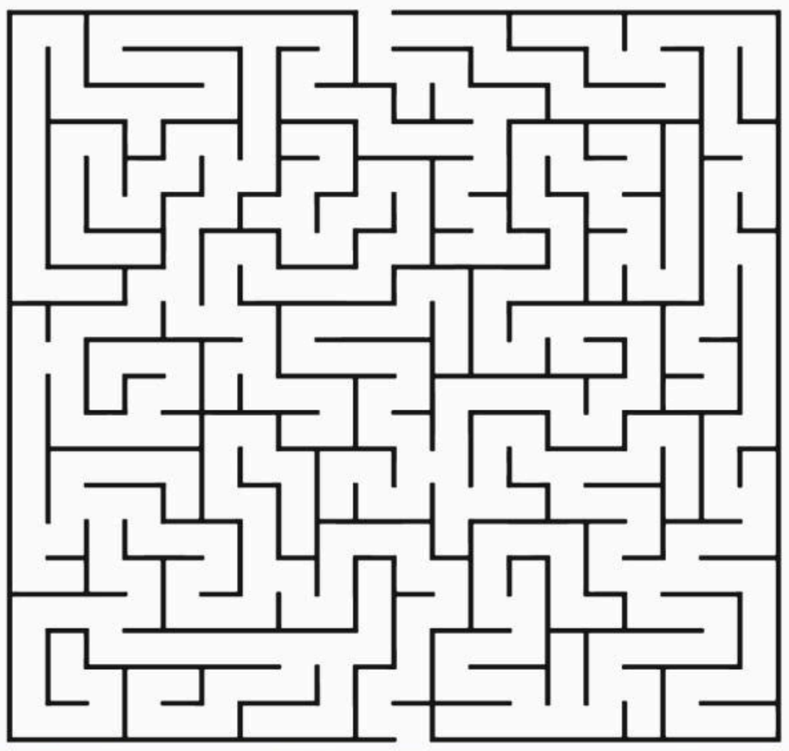


## Terrific Trivia with Pacer Pete

Read all the stories to find the answers!

1. What school did Professor Hamlyn get her Master's degree in Wind Conducting from?

_____

2. When did UT Martin's Chick-fil-A reopen?

_____

3. Who is the advisor for UT Martin's D&D Club?

_____

4. What football team will UT Martin play on Family Weekend?

_____

5. How many freshmen did UT Martin welcome this semester?

_____

**Aubrey Abbott | Pacer Staff**

# Enrollment soars to record highs across UT System

Marques Rice | Pacer Staff

University of Tennessee campuses are experiencing exponential growth and setting record-high enrollment numbers.

For the last six years, the UT System has reported increased enrollment, with a total of 64,866 students enrolled for the 2025 fall semester. The University of Tennessee at Martin set its own record this semester, with 8,101 total students enrolled - up from 7,507 in 2024. This can be attributed to many factors, such as the second-year Chancellor, Dr. Yancy Freeman's goal to have more than 10,000 students enrolled in the school within the next few years. However, retention rates are down compared to previous years, which is a goal the university will need to address.

During the pandemic, colleges and universities reached record-low enrollment rates due to the uncertainty of the future higher education.

"Enrollment went down in Fall 2021 because of COVID-19, but has gone back up since," said Destin Tucker, Assistant Vice Chancellor for Enrollment Management. "Numbers grew from 7,119 students in Fall 2020 to about 8,101 expected in Fall 2025."

A major reason for this spike in enrollment is the number of freshmen. UT Martin recently reported its largest freshman enrollment class in 15 years, with 1,329 first-year students reported to campus this semester. This represents the trend, with Fall 2023 and 2024 having 1,118 and 1,220, respectively.

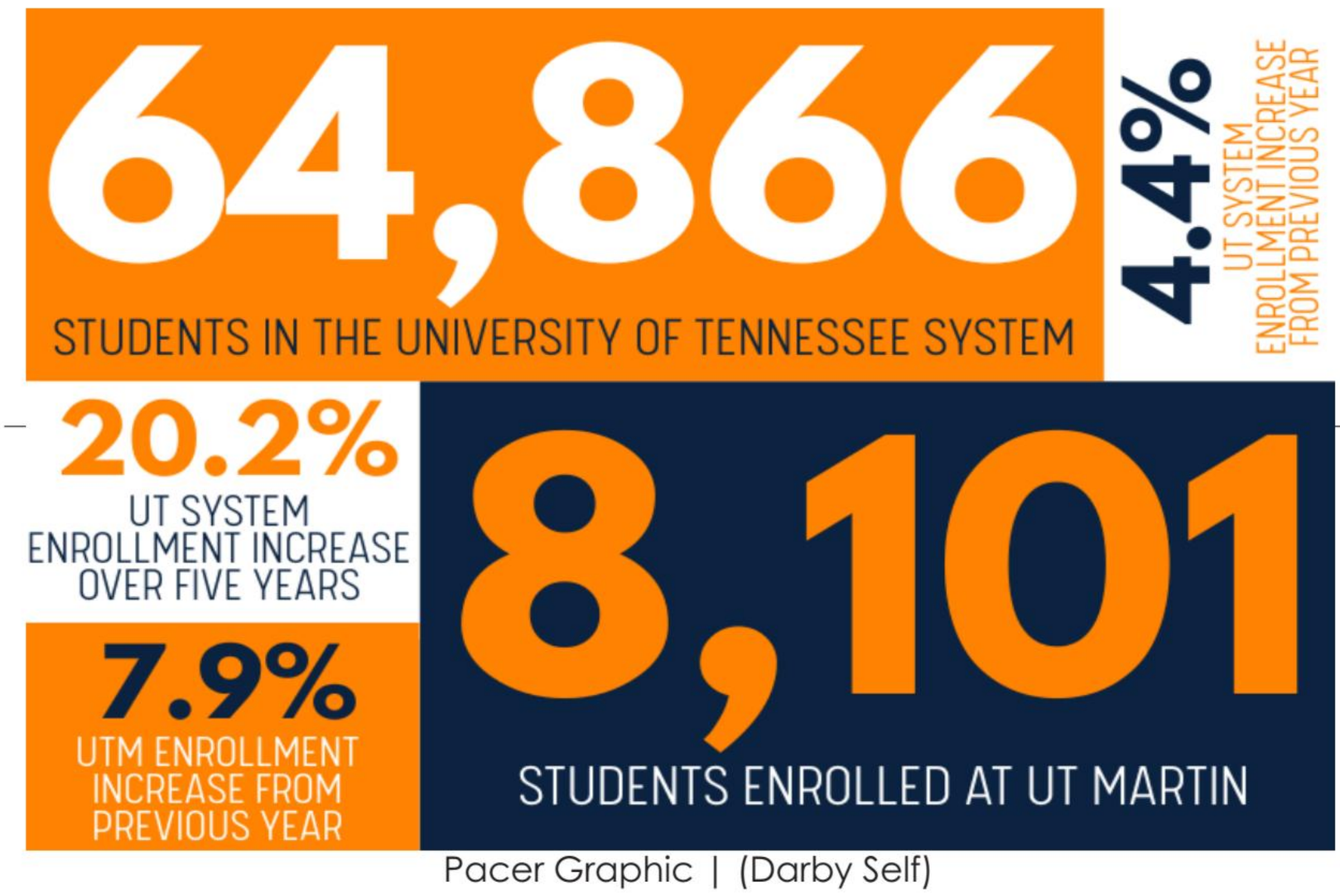
"I chose UTM because I like the small campus," said Vivian Thomas, a freshman business major at UT Martin. "In my first few weeks, I have felt very welcomed by many professors who genuinely care about my success."

Thomas went on to explain how she has been making friends throughout her classes and by participating in different events on campus. UT Martin is close to home for her, but it gives her enough space to grow and develop into her own person, she said.

With the increase in students applying and enrolling in college after COVID-19, many questions and concerns arise not only from potential students but also from their families.

"I know what it feels like to not have all the answers," said Sinahi Carrizales, Admissions Counselor at UT Martin. "That's why I want to be someone students can lean on ... We are not just guiding students, but also reassuring their families that this is the right place for their child."

UT Martin has implemented new recruiting tactics, focusing on getting students into college during their high school careers, starting college visits and tours as early as sophomore year, and focusing on keeping students grounded in their studies. They are also giving students the chance to dive deeper into their hobbies and interests by hosting camps for students as young as middle school.




Pacer Graphic | (Darby Self)

HAMLYN from page 1

Upon realizing that the Music degree would take longer to complete, she tried the music degree program and ended up staying in it for the remainder of college.

"It's interesting because education ends up being more of a combination of an art and a science, you're learning how to interact with students and respond to students. But you're also learning theories and principles and things that tried and true work every time. So it's the mix has been really enjoyable, actually," she said.

Hamlyn earned her Bachelor's degree in Music Education at the University of Alabama. She later earned a Master's degree in Wind Conducting at the University of Kentucky. After receiving what was essentially a degree in both education and music, Hamlyn became an Assistant Director of Athletic Bands at Clemson University for two years.

Growing up as a Tennessee resident, Hamlyn was very excited when she found out there was an application open at UT Martin. She had always known about the college and its Aviators Marching Band, which had influenced her decision to take the job.

"I knew that the students at UT Martin were going to be super high quality, they were going to be super hard workers, the environment was going to be one where everybody was a community and a family, I wanted to come together [to unite] under music."

At this point in the school year, Hamlyn has had nothing but praise to say about the students she has worked with thus far.

"The students are wonderful. I've been completely blown away by how hard they have worked and how much effort they put into every rehearsal and every performance that we've been a part of," she said.

Even though it is only Hamlyn's first year at Martin, she is still highly involved in some of the Music department's biggest plans.

"So one of the big things we're doing right now is bringing back programs that have happened in the past. So [November 8], we're doing High School Band Day," she said. "It's the TSU game, and we're inviting a bunch of high schoolers from anywhere in the country to come and join us and perform at both halftime and in the stands throughout the football game."

While being a professor and marching band director, Hamlyn balances a home life with her husband, Caleb, and 13-month-old son, Jack.

"[Caleb's] the band director at Paducah-Tillman High School. Go Tornadoes! And so we share a lot of things. We work together on things. He's an incredible graphic designer. So he definitely gives me pointers and tips as far as that's concerned. I think I arrange more music than he does. So I give him tips on that," she said.

Hamlyn is also aware that her young son may also develop an interest in music like the rest of the family.

"He's in love with music. He loves being around the bands. Whenever we go to contests or football games or any of those kinds of things, he comes along, and he's really excited about it," she said.

Isabelle Dockery, a junior Veterinary Science major from Knoxville, praised Hamlyn.

"She's very efficient, but also helps us strive to be better than we always are at each practice, [she leads us to not only] grow as musicians, but also kind of as friends and kind of like a family as well," she said.

Clara Kallaos, a senior Music Education major from Lebanon who is currently the Aviators' drum major, also put in a good word for Hamlyn.

"She's very positive. There's just an overwhelming sense of love and passion and I can really tell that she really loves what she does. It's really cool to watch her get up there and get into that role of the athletic band director," Kallaos said.

As a closing statement, Hamlyn asked students to get involved with the Aviators Marching Band if they are interested.

"If you're not involved with the Aviators Marching Band, and this is something you're interested in, we would love to have as many people involved as possible," she said

Hamlyn and her family of music educators will continue to play an active role in the UT Martin Aviators as the football season continues.

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# D&D is being revived on UT Martin campus

Lauren Davis | Pacer Staff

The Dungeons and Dragons (D&D) community has been brought back to life on the University of Tennessee at Martin campus with a high class revivify spell.

D&D, for those who don't know, is a tabletop role-playing game that was initially released in 1974 and gained popularity in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The Paul Meek Library and the D&D club have taken the campus by storm with their workshops, gaining a name with the fantasy community. Advisor Ronne Cox has also brought the club back to life within the last two years.

On Sept. 5, the D&D club had one of its usual workshops and had to turn away students due to full campaign tables. To help its numbers grow, the club is now seeking out more dungeon masters for tables.

Mrs. Cox said, "You would think it would feel good to max out, but I felt like crap. We never want to turn people away from the library, so we've been looking for more DMs so more people can play."

Her mission is to not only increase library engagement but also provide an educational experience for the students who engage with the D&D club, both in officer and player positions. She claims that it not only provides a sense of community to students but also a chance to gain real-world experience in organizing events and reaching out to the campus.

This all raised the question: Why has D&D regained so much popularity, especially here at UT Martin?

Bailey Hester, vice president of the D&D club, says, "I would say that the media heavily influenced Dungeons and Dragons coming back to popularity. Some people find it through D&D podcasts, shows like Stranger Things, and friends recommending it to them."

Students from the workshop claimed that they enjoyed the sense of community it brings and the whimsy of being someone else in tabletop roleplay.

College students seek ways to escape their stressful work schedules and the chaos of everyday campus life. What better way to do that than to spend a couple of hours being someone completely different with a couple of strangers or friends?

Our guess as to why D&D has gained so much popularity over the last two years is its sense of escape.

If you're looking for a new hobby or just a getaway for a couple of hours from your everyday schedule, try D&D. It just may be the escape from reality that you've been searching for.

# Chick-Fil-A hits road bumps in return to UT Martin

Ja'Tyria Greer & Marques Rice | Pacer Staff

Chick-fil-A at the University of Tennessee at Martin has been open for three weeks, and staff and students say the changes are already having an impact.

Lines stretched through the Boling University Center after the restaurant opened at 10 a.m. Monday on Sept. 8, and students are still experiencing many of the same frustrations that came with the smaller location. Many orders are coming from the kitchen incorrect or are missing key items. There have also been complaints of students being overcharged for their meals or not being charged at all.

These complaints are not going unheard; workers and management have been doing their best to deal with the lengthy lines during the lunch rush. "We have been hearing everyone's complaints and are doing everything that we can to make the process of getting your food as smooth as possible. However, working fast leads to mistakes and miscommunication," said Tamara Dennett, a UT Martin junior and shift supervisor at Chick-fil-A. "We want everyone's order to come out in a timely manner and be correct to their satisfaction."

Chick-fil-A is actively working to fix the kinks and make the process flow smoother. Customers must understand that Chick-fil-A supports more than just the campus, but the city of Martin as a whole.

Outside of the service itself, many students are disappointed in the lack of menu options, such as the lack of fried or grilled chicken tenders. There is currently no timeline set for when this item will be available at the location. "As far as a full menu, we are run through a company called Sodexo. We are not a typical Chick-fil-A; we can only serve what we are provided," said Dennett

Reflected was the excitement over Wopening day, the addition meant a wider variety of meals in the dining hall. According to retail manager Christy McDonald from Martin, reopening took preparation behind the scenes.

"The biggest challenges with reopening was first getting enough staff hired and second retraining on the registers on how to use the new KDS equipment," she said.

The return of Chick-fil-A emphasized an effort to make on-campus life more convenient. Students said they are excited to have Chick-fil-A back up and going.

"I think it's cool that Chick-fil-A is reopening on campus," said Ashley Cotton, a sophomore from Memphis on opening day. "Having more options is always a plus for the student experience at UTM."

For UT Martin, the impact has been visible immediately. The long lines, busy lunch hours and steady evening traffic all point to Chick-fil-A becoming a central spot for campus dining once again.

Chick-Fil-A meal at the grand opening of their larger location in the UT Martin Food Court Monday, Sept. 8, 2025. | ***(Pacer Photo / Dallas Boyd)***

"I haven't had a chance to order anything yet, but I heard it was full service and I'm happy about that," said Loevi Spencer, a junior from Humboldt on opening day. Spencer added that the new setup is supposed to make the process easier because you'll get your food and pay at the same time instead of having to walk to another line.

With the restaurant officially open, staff and students say they're looking forward to making Chick-fil-A a bigger part of campus life.

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# Charlie Kirk's death sparks free speech in workplaces debate

Bethany Collins | Pacer Staff

Charlie Kirk speaks before he is shot during Turning Point's visit to Utah Valley University in Orem, Utah, Wednesday, Sept. 10, 2025. ***(Tess Crowley/The Deseret News via AP)***

America should not need the assassination of a controversial speaker to be reminded of the value of free speech.

Charlie Kirk was polarizing. He drew crowds of young supporters and critics alike, sparking debates. But regardless of whether you agreed with his ideas, he had the right to express them without fearing for his life.

Since his death, his organization, Turning Point USA (TPUSA), has reported a surge of interest. "In the past 8 days, TPUSA has received 62,000+ requests from high school and college students nationwide to start a chapter or get involved with an existing chapter," the group tweeted on Sept. 18, 2025. This kind of momentum shows that moments of violence do not silence a movement, it amplifies it.

Conservative strategist Matt Whitlock compared the reaction to the way Trump supporters rallied when the President was attacked. For many young voters, Kirk's death feels like the same kind of rallying cry.

The fallout has not just mobilized supporters, but it has cost people their jobs over what they said about his death online.

In Tennessee, Middle Tennessee State University fired an assistant dean of students after she wrote on Facebook that she had "zero sympathy" for Kirk. The university's president called the remarks "inappropriate and callous."

Administrators at the University of Tennessee placed assistant anthropology professor Tamar Shirinian on leave and began termination proceedings after screenshots showed her posting things such as "the world is better without him in it." UT's statement emphasized 'swift action,' but it raised a bigger question for me: swift for whom, and by what standard?

"Generally, civil service employees are protected for their political speech and activities performed outside the workplace as a private citizen. In recent years, however, the Courts have allowed government employees to be fired if their comments were not on matters of "public concern" and were disruptive to the workplace," said Dr. Chris Baxter, a political science and constitutional law professor at the University of Tennessee at Martin.

This isn't limited to campuses. The trend has stretched nationwide, with employers from pro sports teams to federal agencies firing or suspending employees for posts that higher-ups have deemed unethical for their companies. This highlights the rising tensions between personal speech and workplace reputation.

We see this trickling to ABC late-night host Jimmy Kimmel, who is being suspended indefinitely for his comments on Kirk's death. Kimmel had said that the MAGA gang was "desperately trying to characterize this kid who murdered Charlie Kirk as anything other than one of them," seemingly trying to add more division to the conversation. His suspension has lifted and he will return to TV on Tuesday, Sept. 23, 2025.

So the main question everyone's asking is how is this legal? We as Americans have the right to speak freely, but not to speak without consequences.

"Essentially, the First Amendment protects us from the government, not private actors like our employers. The Free Speech Clause prevents the government from filing criminal or civil charges against us for peacefully speaking our minds on issues of public concern," said Baxter. "Private employers, though, have generally been allowed to reprimand or fire employees on the basis of preserving professionalism in the workplace. The issue is more complicated for public employees."

That's the law. The main issue arises from how these standards are enforced in different situations. If celebrating a political rival's death gets you fired in one case but a similar offense gets a slap on the wrist, that is not accountability; it's favoritism.

Even amid discourse online, there was a surprising gesture towards civility, there were gestures toward civility. CNN commentator Van Jones received a direct message from Charlie Kirk before his death which included an invitation to have a "respectful dialogue" while promising they could maintain respectful disagreement. The message he sent before his death does not justify the cruel posts that followed his passing, but it does remind me of a better alternative: talk instead of hurt.

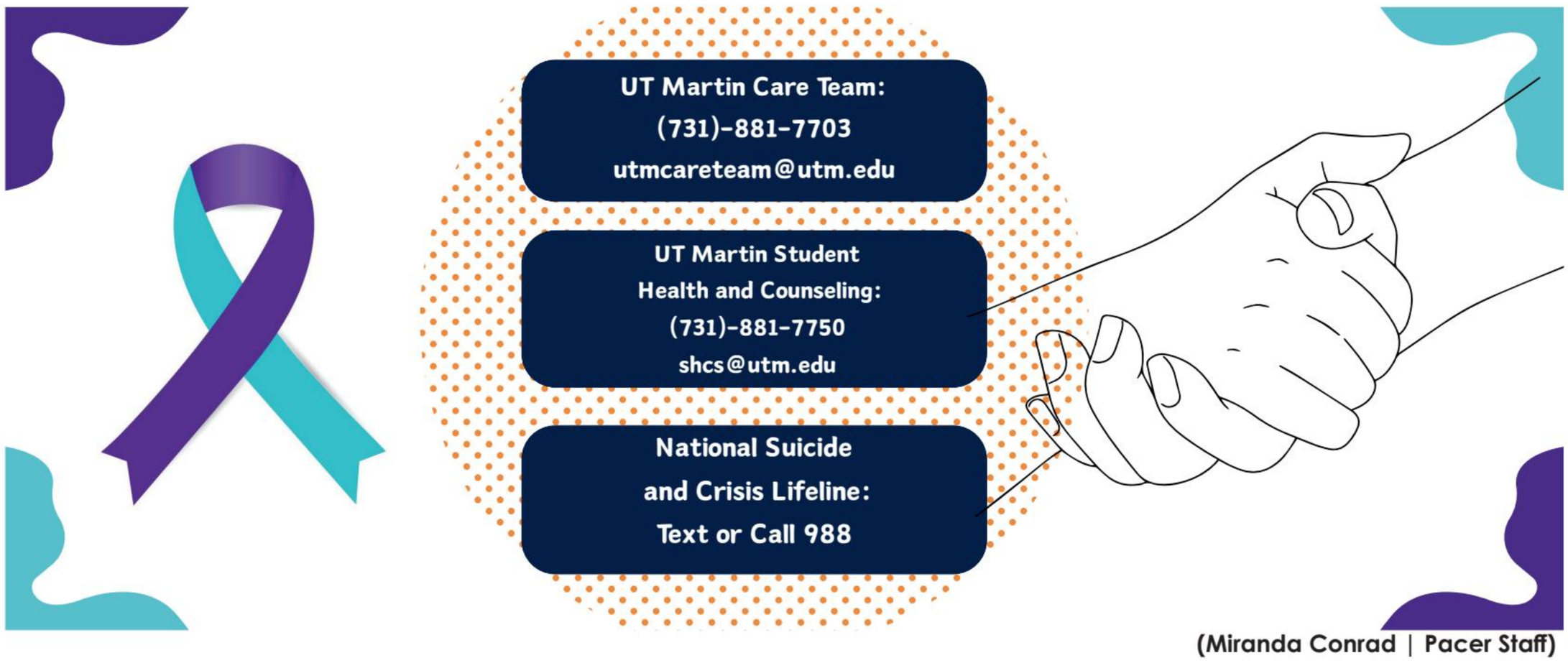
One thing that has been with me during the writing of this is seeing all the memorials and vigils for Kirk. Some vigils were more down to earth and some had more fanfare. Nothing hit me harder than seeing Erika Kirk, Charlie's widow, come out on stage in Glendale, Arizona to a packed State Farm Arena.

Seeing her, a woman who lost her husband for using his right to get young people interested in politics and learning what they believe in, walk on stage with hundreds of thousands of people cheering for her, stirred something in me.

As a history lover, it reminded me of other women who have lost their husbands for speaking their minds. From Jackie Kennedy to Betty Shabazz to Coretta Scott King, it hit something differently. And it was Erika Kirk's words that resonated most: her forgiveness of the man who killed her husband because, as she said, "I forgive him because it was what Christ did. And is what Charlie would do."

Kirk's legacy will always be controversial. Some will praise him, while others will scorn him because they see his message as hateful. One thing we can all hopefully agree on is that no one should be killed for speaking and encouraging polite debate.

As Charlie Kirk said, "When people stop talking, that's when you get violence, that is when civil war happens." No one should live in fear of being killed for an opinion. And no one should lose their livelihood for simply expressing one. Free speech does not mean speech without consequences, but if consequences depend on what side you stand on, we've lost the right altogether.




(Miranda Conrad | Pacer Staff)

# Did 'HIM' make 'US' wanna 'GET OUT'? 'NOPE'!

Bryant Steele | Pacer Staff

Everybody wants to be somebody, but what are you willing to sacrifice to get there? That's the question that Monkeypaw Productions' new film *Him* asks its audience. Released on Sept. 19 and directed by Justin Tipping, *Him* tackles its viewers with astonishing effects, beautiful cinematography and a carefully crafted script. While it doesn't quite measure up to other Monkeypaw projects of the same genre, such as *Get Out* and *Nope*, it stands its ground as the youngest film in the established studio's impressive catalogue.

*Him* follows the story of up-and-coming collegiate football star Cameron "Cam" Cade (Tyriq Withers) and how he finds himself wrapped up in a dark plot surrounding his idol, Isaiah White (Marlon Wayans). Under the weight of his dreams, Cam becomes drenched in blood, sweat and tears on his path to stardom.

In the opening scene, a young Cam, alongside his family, watches as his favorite football team, the San Antonio Saviors, win the league championship game. The moment is fleeting, however, as the Saviors' quarterback, Isaiah, suffers a brutal, possibly career-ending, injury whilst scoring the game-winning touchdown. Cam's father chooses to take this moment to tell Cam that real men are willing to make sacrifices for what they want. This is an ideal that will haunt Cam throughout the rest of the feature.

Jumping to Cam's young adult years, he is now a very prominent star in college football, to such an extent that he is being hailed as "the next Isaiah White." While training for the league combine late at night, Cam is struck in the head by someone wearing a goat costume. This leaves him with a career-threatening head injury and a splintered mind. Tom (Tim Heidecker), Cam's agent who coincidentally happens to be Isaiah's agent as well, tells Cam that Isaiah is contemplating retirement. He also relays that Isaiah has invited him to a week-long retreat at his property in the desert.

Every day at the retreat becomes increasingly demented as Isaiah puts Cam through constant physical and mental anguish via "training" until it all boils over at the climax. The ending is one audiences will be thinking about long after the credits roll.

**SPOILERS AHEAD...**

From start to finish, *Him* leaves its audience guessing what's going to happen next, while also meticulously placing breadcrumbs to the truth throughout its well paced 96 minute run-time. From his father's shrine to the game that they're watching, we see how, from the very beginning, Isaiah's presence overshadows Cam's very existence without him even being introduced as a character yet.

Something the film does well is address how toxic masculinity and the commoditization of athletes creates a dangerous environment for players and their families. Cam's father, Isaiah, Tom and many other characters continue to tell Cam that he must be willing to make sacrifices in order to win. The phrase that Cam's father engraves in his head at the top of the movie is "no guts, no glory" and that sentiment is repeated time and time again.

There are also themes of peer pressure when Isaiah and his personal doctor, Marco (Jim Jefferies), constantly offer Cam a "hit" of Isaiah's blood. The blood of Him. This could be adjacent to how some athletes feel pressured to use performance enhancing drugs to help them reach an upper echelon.

Just like in real life, this metaphorical drug has its kickbacks. Cam begins having daily hallucinations that break his mind until he's ready for the film's climax.

From the moment they met, Isaiah has been grooming Cam for a cultic ritual. As it turns out, the blood of Him doesn't mean the blood of Isaiah. No, the blood and title of Him is a manufactured one that has been passed down through generations of players all hailed as "the chosen one". The blood transfusions that were being performed on Cam by Marco throughout the movie were part of this ritual and were meant to prepare him for this very moment.

Isaiah reveals to Cam that his contract is up at the end of the year and the Saviors need a quarterback. Cam recognizes that this means that only one can leave. Similar to the gladiator battles that Marco had been alluding to earlier, Cam and Isaiah brawl.

After having his left arm broken in the fight, Cam rallies and kills his idol. This "sacrifice" sets Cam on the path to achieve everything that he's ever wanted. Without getting into spoiler territory for the bloody finale, Cam discovers the truth and makes what feels like the first real choice that he's been given in his entire life.

With a show stealing performance by Marlon Wayans, a brave new direction from Justin Tipping and stunning cinematography from Kira Kelly, *Him* sets out to make a name for itself without all of the sacrifices attached. Despite receiving scathing criticism from critics and low scores on *Metacritic* and *Rotten Tomatoes*, *Him* is, above all else, a good cinematic experience. While not perfect, it at least scores that first down.

**Grade**: 6/10

# Artistic creativity shines at annual 'Guitar As Art' exhibition

JJ Somerville | Pacer Staff

Various festivities were celebrated throughout the Soybean Festival week in Martin, Tennessee. One event in particular displayed the unique artistry of talented individuals.

The 11th annual *Guitar As Art* exhibition opened on Aug. 31 and ran through Sept. 20. It featured 30 acoustic guitars that were hand-painted and decorated with designs ranging from vibrant landscapes to nostalgic, cartoon-themed creations.

*Guitar As Art* was established in 2014, with the original concept an event for painting guitars.

"Katie Smith, who had done a fundraiser for the symphony, and I talked for three hours about how we can improve our show for the Soybean Festival. That is how we came up with most of the rules and guidelines for *Guitar As Art*," said Jason Stout, a coordinator for the exhibition and professor of Art at the University of Tennessee at Martin.

Stout explained that the city of Martin would purchase 30 identical guitars, which would allow the first 30 artists, all of whom are 18 and over, to participate in the exhibition. As coordinator, he is responsible for acquiring all the guitars, collaborating with the artists during the process and overseeing the installation of the show.

One of the artists featured this year was Maggie Moffett, a junior graphic design major at UT Martin.

While brainstorming ideas for her guitar design, Moffett drew inspiration from the beloved yellow sponge, SpongeBob SquarePants.

"I came up with the design when talking to Heather Alexander, who also has a guitar in the show. Heather wanted to do a guitar centered around the *SpongeBob* episode, *When Worlds Collide* which has a scene in it where a robot and a cavemen are singing the lyrics, 'When worlds collide, you can run but you can't hide.' So I suggested that we split the scene with me doing the robot while they chose to do the caveman." she said.

The pair still needed a way to make the guitars look connected, so they decided to create portals that resembled the other person's guitar scene.

Advice that Moffett would give anyone interested in participating next year would be, "Don't be so intimated by the shape and to just have fun with it."

Each year as the show changes, artists are allowed to come back and create a new design or revamp a prior one. They also have the chance to compete for awards in three categories: Best of Show ($500 purchase prize from the city), Best Cinematic (theme provided by Stout and judged by a juror), and Viewer's Choice (the audience vote at the opening reception).

The winner for Best of Show was April Hosey, a junior studio arts major from White Bluff, Tennessee, for "Mid-Century Post-Modern Daydream," which showcased an intergalactic aesthetic. Abi Hellmich from Union City, Tennessee, won Best Cinematic for "Timeless Tennessee," which captured butterflies scattered throughout an array of flowers. Dr. Roberto Mancusi, a professor of music at UT Martin, won Best Cinematic for "Childhood Timewarp," which featured classic cartoons such as *The Flintstones* and *The Jetsons*.

"It was definitely a surprise to win because there were so many terrific guitars this year. When I first thought about design ideas, I remembered my childhood and realized those two cartoons fit the theme perfectly, but since it was the most ambitious pyrography project I've done so far, I was really apprehensive that I wouldn't get it right," said Mancusi. "Now that it's finished, I'm extremely happy with how it turned out, even if I hadn't won."

(L to R): April Hosey's guitar art, "Mid-Century Post-Modern Daydream," won for Best of Show. Abi Hellmich's guitar art, "Timeless Tennessee," won the People's Choice award. Dr. Roberto Mancusi's guitar art, "Childhood Timewarp," won Best Thematic at the *Guitar As Art* exhibition on Sunday, August 31, 2025.
***(Pacer Photo / JJ Somerville)***

Stout not only coordinates the details of the exhibition, but he also selects a juror to vote, which is someone who is outside of the city of Martin and its region.

"So whoever comes in to judge the art, they have a good artistic background but also don't really know any of the artists. That way, there's no favoritism and nepotism because you want the integrity of the jury process to be good," Stout said.

This year, the opening reception for the exhibition saw a groundbreaking attendance of 350 people, and Stout hopes to keep the momentum up for the next one.

"The one thing that I've wanted to try to grow or advance on is I would love to get funding to either purchase more of the guitars or get them placed with either businesses or on campus in different offices," he said.

The annual *Guitar As Art* exhibition will return during the 2026 Soybean Festival in the Fine Arts Gallery.

1. ANYTHING-ADRIANNE LENKER

2. WE TIME- COI LERAY

3. KISSING IN PUBLIC- DESTIN CONRAD

4. GABRIELA- KATESYE

5. SWEET BOY- MALCOLM TODD

6. PUTTING YA DINE- MONALEO

7. LAVA LAMP- THUNDERCAT

8. MIDNIGHT SUN- ZARA LARSSON

HONORABLE MENTIONS:

ACTS OF SERVICE- DOJA CAT

HELLO- CARDI B

PACER GRAPHIC/ ADRIANNA' CARTER

# Music artists to fall in love with this season

JJ Somerville / A&E Editor

As the heat wave starts to fade, the chilly fall breeze is slowly but surely making its way into the atmosphere. What could be a better way to welcome the new season than with music to fall in love with? Here is a curated list of artists from various genres, ranging from indie, hip-hop, R&B and pop to give a listen to as you watch the leaves drastically change colors.

**1. Adrianne Lenker**

Before the pandemic hit, Adrienne Lenker and her indie folk-rock band, *Big Thief*, were expecting to tour for the entire year, but due to the restrictions, the tour got canceled. However, the setback didn't stop the Indiana native from carving her own path as an established solo artist. Lenker was the principal songwriter for her band, so writing her own songs came easily. With her delicate and angelic voice, her music explores the essence of self-identity and the reminiscence of love as well as loss. Her 2020 solo album, *songs*, is considered her most popular project, with the intimate and acoustic track anything gaining popularity on the social media platform, TikTok.

**2. Coi Leray**

She is not only known for being the daughter of controversial television personality Benzino, Coi Leray is also a self-made rapper. Her rise to stardom came from the release of the viral song, *No More Parties,* which was followed by a remix featuring rapper Lil Durk. She then collaborated with notable artists such as Nicki Minaj, Tomorrow X Together and Metro Boomin. Leray is known for blending rap with melodic elements that also feature catchy hooks that can get stuck in your head for days. Her unique take on fashion, which expresses her bold and energetic personality, makes her stand out amongst other artists. In February 2025, Leray released an EP titled, *What Happened To Forever?*, which explored heartbreak from a previous relationship. However, her song *We Time* from her previous EP, *Lemon Cars,* is making its waves on Spotify with over 1.7 million streams.

3. **DESTIN CONRAD**

After finding success from uploading humorous six second clips on the popular short-form video app, *Vine*, Destin Conrad decided to explore his talent in music. The Tampa native has evolved himself into one of R&B's most prominent stars. He has penned songs for artists such as Kehlani and several members of the popular K-Pop group, *BTS*. Although Conrad was never afraid to express himself freely through short-lived funny clips online, he has since then showed a much more creative and versatile side through his music. Conrad's debut album, *Love on Digital*, which was released in April 2025, displays his soulful vocals, confidence and freedom of self-expression. The track *KISSING IN PUBLIC* from the album is an upbeat and romantic song that will make you happy it is finally fall.

4. **KATSEYE**

They're not just the girls from the viral Gap ad. Based in Los Angeles, California, the global girl group KATSEYE are rapidly rising to the top of the Billboard charts just within their first year of debuting. The multifaceted group is composed of six members: Daniela Avanzini, Lara Raj, Manon Bannerman, Megan Skiendiel, Sophia Laforteza and Yoonchae. With members being from different regions of the world, such as the United States, Switzerland, South Korea and the Philippines, the group stands out as more unique and diverse than past girl groups. KATSEYE rose to stardom in 2024 after competing in the Netflix show Pop Star Academy under the direction of HYPE x Geffen. Their hit song, *Touch*, took the world by storm and won them their first award at the 2025 *VMAS*. These girls are definitely securing their spot as one of the best girl groups of all time and their newest track Gabriela definitely should make it into your playlist this season.

**5. Malcolm Todd**

Malcolm Todd, a multi-instrumentalist musician from Los Angeles, is rising to the top of the Spotify charts with his hit single and mixtape, *Sweet Boy*. Although he is getting well deserved recognition now, he was always destined for stardom. Todd's love for music was heavily influenced by his mother, as she would play Broadway CDs during car rides. He began taking piano lessons and found his passion in alternative R&B. According to Another Planet Entertainment, Todd went from covering songs by artists such as The Beatles and Dominic Fike to him uploading actual tracks that he had written and produced himself. This year, he released his self-titled debut album that showcased vulnerability and authenticity.

**6. Monaleo**

Megan Thee Stallion is not the only Houston native taking over the rap game; Monaleo is making her mark on her own terms. Born as Leondra Roshawn Gay, she combined her real name with the revolutionary painting "Mona Lisa" by Leonardo da Vinci. Monaleo is recognized for her fast delivery and clever lyricism which she displays in her music. Her post-breakup anthem, *Beating Down Yo Block,* went viral in 2021. Although she is not signed to a record label yet, Monaleo releases her music independently and freely as she desires. Her consistency, confident and unapologetic personality keeps fans wanting more. In September 2025, she released the track *Putting Ya Dine* that was well received on social media.

**7. Thundercat**

Stephen Lee Bruner, better known by his distinctive stage name, Thundercat, is a Grammy-winning singer, bassist and songwriter. The Los Angeles native tested the musical waters in high school as a bassist for the crossover thrash band *Suicidal Tendencies*. After he departed the band in 2011, Thundercat reinvented his sound to the psychedelic funk and jazz elements that he's widely popular for now. His music is a mixture of humorous lyricism and dreamy falsetto vocals which ties into his sound. He has contributed his masterful bassist skills and other talents to notable artists such as Erykah Badu, Mac Miller and Kendrick Lamar. Thundercat's 2020 album, *It Is What It Is*, received much praise from audience and secured him his second Grammy award. Although he has released a new project this year, the song *Lava Lamp* from his 2017 album *Drunk* is still a timeless and melodic classic to give your ears a listen to.

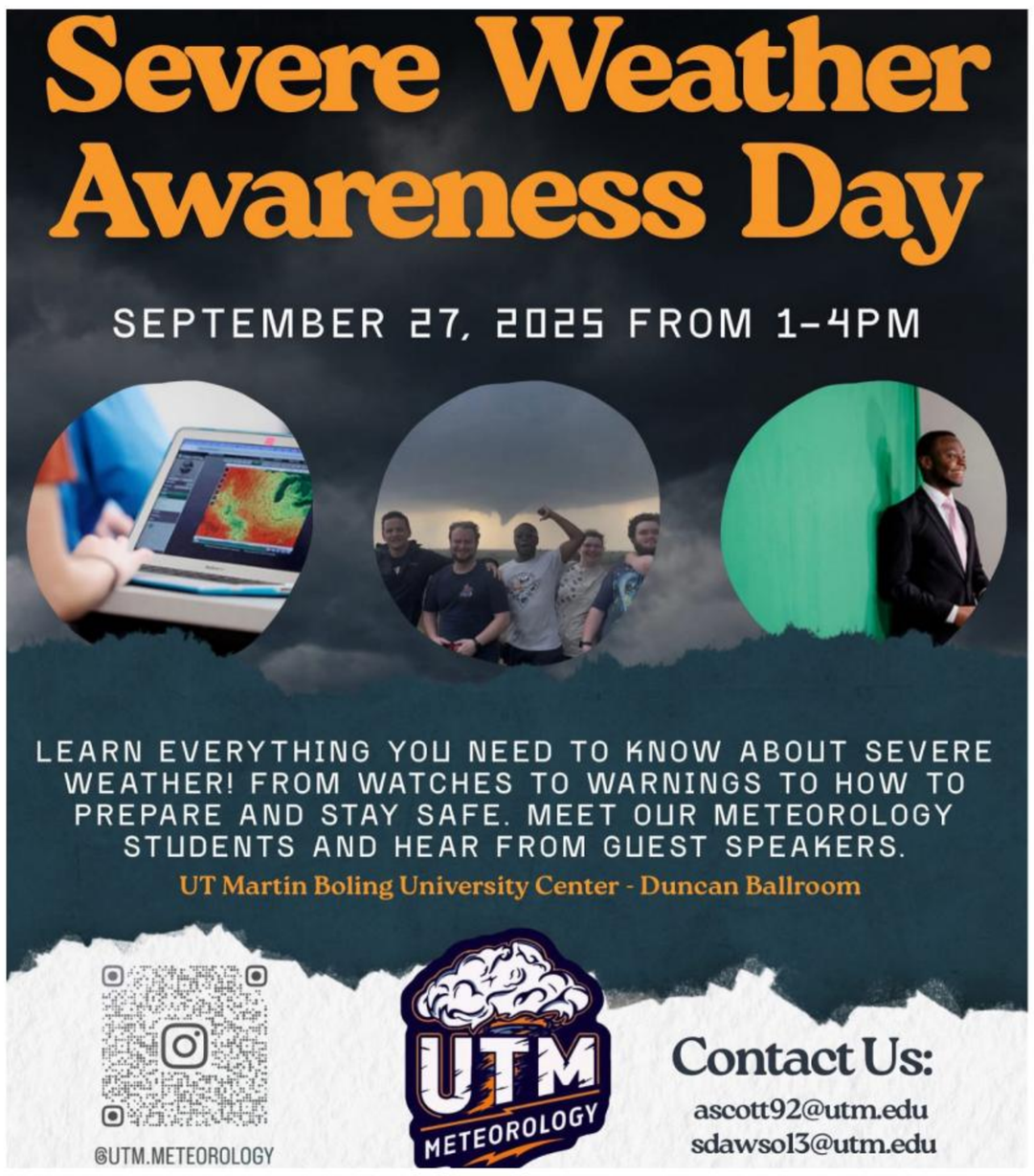
**8. Zara Larsson**

Although the Swedish beauty Zara Larsson is currently an opener on tour for another rising star, Tate McRae, she is headlining her own tour for her newest album, *Midnight Sun* next year. The music video for the titled track on her album went viral on social media platforms due to its electrifying visuals that reminds people of the Lisa Frank stickers and nostalgic Windows XP background called Bliss. Not only that, but Larsson also reminded the world that her fiery and powerful vocals have never left and that you should never count her out in your top 10 singers list. Larsson rose to fame at the age of 10 by winning the 2008 season of *Talang*, which is the Swedish version of *America's Got Talent*. She has gone on to release hit singles such as *Never Forget You* in a collaboration with singer MNEK. Her music is a nice blend of electronic pop and R&B, which can serve as a great escape from reality this fall.

Pacer graphic/ Adrianna' Carter

EVENT PASS REQUIRED
Food Truck Night
FRIDAY, SEPT. 26 | 4-8 PM
FESTIVAL PARK - DOWNTOWN MARTIN
UT MARTIN FAMILY WEEKEND
FOOD TRUCKS | DJ-TRIP C | GAMES
FREE $5 FOOD VOUCHERS
TO THE FIRST 300 STUDENTS

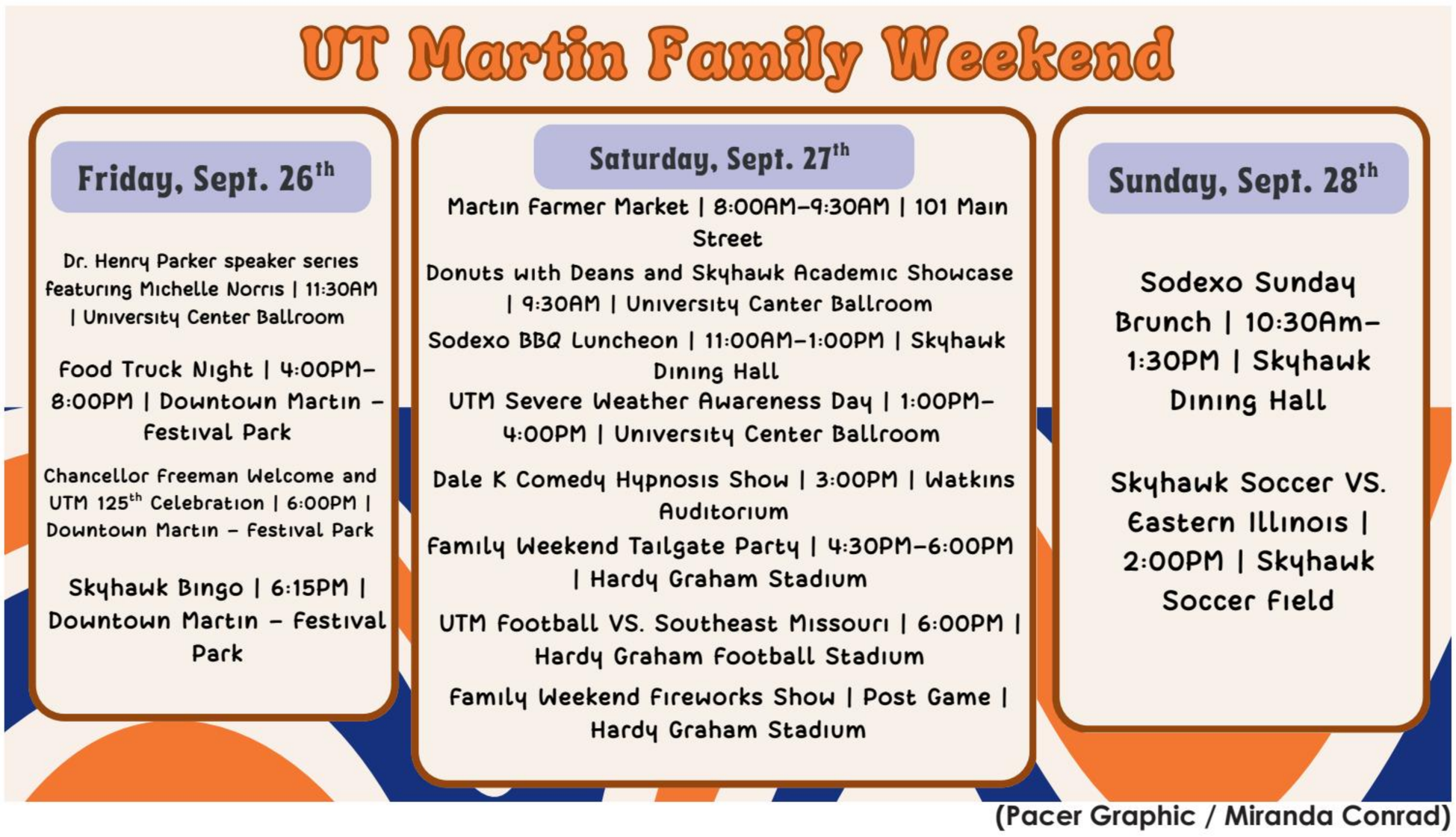
(Pacer Graphic / Rhyleigh Ulen)


Severe Weather Awareness Day
SEPTEMBER 27, 2025 FROM 1-4PM
LEARN EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT SEVERE WEATHER! FROM WATCHES TO WARNINGS TO HOW TO PREPARE AND STAY SAFE. MEET OUR METEOROLOGY STUDENTS AND HEAR FROM GUEST SPEAKERS.
UT Martin Boling University Center - Duncan Ballroom
@UTM.METEOROLOGY
UTM METEOROLOGY
Contact Us:
ascott92@utm.edu
sdawso13@utm.edu

(Shaley Snider / UTM Lecturer)

Care Team
GOAT SNUGGLES
October 6, 2025
Need a break? Come relax with the UTM CARE Team and enjoy some Goat Snuggles!
11:00 A.M. - 3:00 P.M.

(Pacer Graphic / Bethany Collins)


UT Martin Family Weekend
Friday, Sept. 26th
Dr. Henry Parker speaker series featuring Michelle Norris | 11:30AM | University Center Ballroom
Food Truck Night | 4:00PM-8:00PM | Downtown Martin - Festival Park
Chancellor Freeman Welcome and UTM 125th Celebration | 6:00PM | Downtown Martin - Festival Park
Skyhawk Bingo | 6:15PM | Downtown Martin - Festival Park
Saturday, Sept. 27th
Martin Farmer Market | 8:00AM-9:30AM | 101 Main Street
Donuts with Deans and Skyhawk Academic Showcase | 9:30AM | University Canter Ballroom
Sodexo BBQ Luncheon | 11:00AM-1:00PM | Skyhawk Dining Hall
UTM Severe Weather Awareness Day | 1:00PM-4:00PM | University Center Ballroom
Dale K Comedy Hypnosis Show | 3:00PM | Watkins Auditorium
Family Weekend Tailgate Party | 4:30PM-6:00PM | Hardy Graham Stadium
UTM Football VS. Southeast Missouri | 6:00PM | Hardy Graham Football Stadium
Family Weekend Fireworks Show | Post Game | Hardy Graham Stadium
Sunday, Sept. 28th
Sodexo Sunday Brunch | 10:30Am-1:30PM | Skyhawk Dining Hall
Skyhawk Soccer VS. Eastern Illinois | 2:00PM | Skyhawk Soccer Field

(Pacer Graphic / Miranda Conrad)

## STUDENT ATHLETE from page 12

But she helped me get my confidence and just hype me up and I've been able to take everything that she said and bring it to UTM," said Rushing.

In year one with the Skyhawks, the team went 24-10 overall and 7-3 in the conference. The team earned the second seed in the OVC Beach Volleyball Championship tournament. In the first matchup of the tournament against the sixth seed Eastern Illinois Panthers, the team pulled a clean sweep, winning 3-0. In the second matchup, they took on the first-seed UT Chattanooga Mocs and fell 0-3. In matchup three, the team faced off against the fourth-seed Lindenwood Lions and got by in a 3-2 finish. In the fourth and final matchup, the team came up just short of the OVC Championship title in a 2-3 finish against the Mocs.

Now, heading into the 2026 season, Rushing and the Skyhawks will look to build off their strong 2025 season. Rushing said the team's expectations are no less than first in the OVC and winning the OVC tournament.

"Our expectation is nothing less than first. I think everybody has that mindset that we're out for blood at this point," said Rushing. Rushing also mentioned how she and the rest of the team have the Chattanooga game marked on their calendars for revenge after losing to them in the 2025 OVC Tournament Championship.

#1 junior Riley Rushing during the OVC Championships at the UTC Volleyball facility on April 4, 2024. ***(UTM Sports Information)***

"I'm not sure when we play them, but the day that we play them, I'm locked in for that day," said Rushing.

Like all student-athletes, the student part comes first, and Rushing must balance that out with her athletic duties. Rushing sets out her day by day with a "bible-sized thick" agenda book.

Rushing's hobby of cooking ties back to who she is as an athlete and as a person.

"I love cooking. That's my biggest one. I think it branched off of volleyball. I wanted to learn how to fuel myself in the best way possible, but also in the cheapest way possible. I fuel myself in the best way possible so I could be the best athlete I can be," said Rushing.

Outside of volleyball, Rushing is also a big fan of basketball, more specifically, the 2025 NBA Finals Champion, the Oklahoma City Thunder. Rushing says she fell in love with the team when current-Bulls point guard Josh Giddey was on the team from 2021 to 2024.

Building on that, Rushing's plan's for post-UT Martin revolve around this favorite team.

"I hope to be a sports broadcaster. I wanna be a reporter for the OKC Thunder."

#15 senior Scottie Alexander runs through two defenders against Missouri State in Robert W. Plaster Stadium on Sept. 20, 2025. ***(UTM Sports Information)***

## SKYHAWKS from page 12

WUTM 90.3 the Hawk's Christian Bryson, who does color commentary for Skyhawk football games, said that the team and its fans should not fear the national narrative of the season being over after an 0-4 start to the season, and you have to take into an account the level of competition so far.

"You have to put it into perspective. UT Martin has not had a cupcake schedule," said Bryson.

"There's some other schools in the conference that have not played this level of competition. UT Martin has only played one home game so far. This schedule has just been brutal, but at the end of the season I expect this team to be where it needs to be," said Bryson.

For the Skyhawks to turn around the 2025 season, they must stop the opponent's runs and run the ball efficiently themselves. Simpson's Skyhawks are continuously put into position where they are down multiple scores because they are unable stop the opposing run game, leading to the Skyhawk being fully reliant on the arm of Senior quarterback (QB) Jase Bauer.

Bryson has been impressed with Bauer's pocket presence and decision making throughout the losing streak, even while being asked to throw more to score points quickly.

"It's crucial that they (Skyhawks) are able to play their style of football. When you are down 31 to zero, you have to change the way you play," said Bryson. "They want to have a well balanced attack while letting Bauer play his game as a passer. Bauer has been efficient, but the big plays just haven't been there as they are not able to create space or run the ball efficiently this season so far."

The Skyhawks return home Sept. 27 to host the 1-3 Southeast Missouri State Redhawks at Hardy M. Graham Stadium. Kickoff is set for 6 p.m.

FOLLOW THE SKYHAWKS: www.utmsports.com

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# UT Martin Soccer continues search for first win

William Stevens / Assistant Sports Editor

After another tie on the season against Southern Indiana, UT Martin Skyhawks soccer falls to a record of 0-4-6.

This consists of a home record of 0-2-5, an away record of 0-2-1 and a conference record of 0-0-1. The next game is against the Lindenwood Tigers, which will be decided by the time this article is published, is a chance for the Skyhawks to grab their first win.

Head coach Mike Varga has great confidence in his team moving forward and, holding a 0-4-6 record, he is not worried about receiving any criticism.

"If you watch them play, you know how hard they work and you can see we're a good team," said Varga. With the remaining schedule consisting of only conference opponents, Varga is working with his team on different things to manage the rest of the season.

"It's managing the physical part of it right now. We have a couple days then you start playing two games a week, so it's managing the physical, making sure we are as healthy as we can be." said Varga. "And I think it's honestly gotten a bit mental for us as far as not being able to score, but I think once we break that we are going to be fine, they score great goals in training everyday. So it's just a little bit of something that they are thinking about too much right now but we'll figure it out."

As it stands, the Skyhawks have a total of two goals on 112 shot attempts this season. The two goals were scored by freshman Kylee Thompson, forward, against Arkansas State, and sophomore Anna Østergaard Ibsen, defense, against Murray State. Other key players for the Skyhawks have been junior Peyton Cook, forward, who currently leads in assist with two, alongside redshirt-senior Mac Titus, goal keeper, who has 42 saves and only four goals allowed. Titus also has five shutouts in eight games played.

After Lindenwood, the Skyhawks will take on the Eastern Illinois Panther at home. The all-time record for this matchup is 13-13-4, where the Skyhawks hold a 9-4-2 home record, looking to add to the winning margin.

Joelle Stinson, #3, a redshirt sophomore from Loveland, Ohio, performing a Throw-In with Addison Clark, #4, a freshman from Frisco, Texas, standing ready to run in and steal the ball at the UT Martin Home Soccer game on Sept. 21, 2025. | **Pacer Photo / (Rose Evelyn)**

# Family weekend brings in the Skyhawks first OVC-Big South Opponent

Connor Butts / Co-Sports Editor

In what marks their first conference game of the season, the UT Martin Skyhawks will host the Southeast Missouri State Redhawks for UT Martin Family Weekend 2025.

*Stats are from https://utmsports.com/sports/football/roster, espn.com and https://semoredhawks.com/sports/football/stats.*

What do the Skyhawks and Redhawks share in common? Both teams lost at home by four touchdown possessions to the Southern Illinois Salukis. The Salukis once again had their way in the game thanks to senior dual-threat quarterback D.J. Williams. Williams finished the game with 493 total yards–151 on the ground and 342 through the air–and six total touchdowns–two on the ground and four through the air. The Redhawks defense could not stop anything, allowing 59 points in a 59-31 loss.

On a side note, the Redhawks offense, as mentioned, managed to put up 31 points in the blowout loss. Typically that would mark a great day and a win for the offense, they just did not bet on the Salukis putting up 59. In the 31 points though, there are bound to be some positives. Sophomore wide receiver Kalvin Gilbert had his first career 100 plus receiving yard game. Another Redhawks wide receiver crossed 100 yards for the game in junior Cam Pedro. That marks Pedro's fourth 100-yard game in his career.

Keep an eye on those two against the Skyhawks secondary, who have allowed three opposing wide receivers to go over 100 receiving yards–UTEP Miners junior Kenny Odom, Miners freshman Toric Gorn Jr. and Missouri State Bears senior Dash Luke.

Making sure Gilbert and Pedro do not get the Skyhawks over the top will be the team's tackle leaders. Senior safety Jacob Stevenson will lead the way with 28 total tackles on the season, and he will also be looking to add to his forced fumble totals with already having one on the season. On the flip side of the field–sideline to sideline–senior safety Josh Hasting could already pass his career high in tackles–26–as he currently sits at 24 on the season.

In press coverage, look out for senior cornerback JaMichael McGoy Jr.. McGoy is the only player on the team with more than one pass deflection this season at four. McGoy

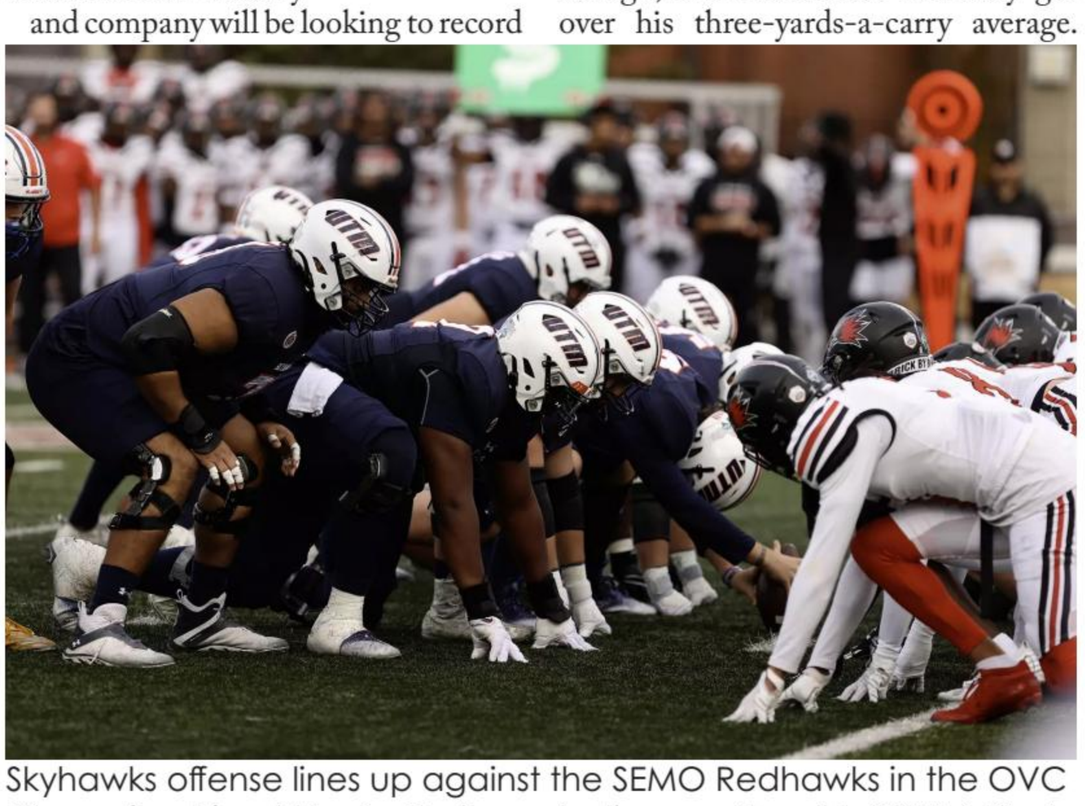
and company will be looking to record their third interception of the season against Redhawks junior quarterback Jax Leatherwood, who is coming off his first thrown interception of the season. Leatherwood comes in with a terrifying frame at quarterback at a height of 6-foot-8 and weight of 253 lbs.

Skyhawks senior quarterback Jase Bauer could be in for a career game. Bauer is facing off against a defense that allowed 342 passing yards and four passing touchdowns while only sacking Williams once. Bauer has been a sharp quarterback this season with a season completion percentage of 69.5 on 105 attempts.

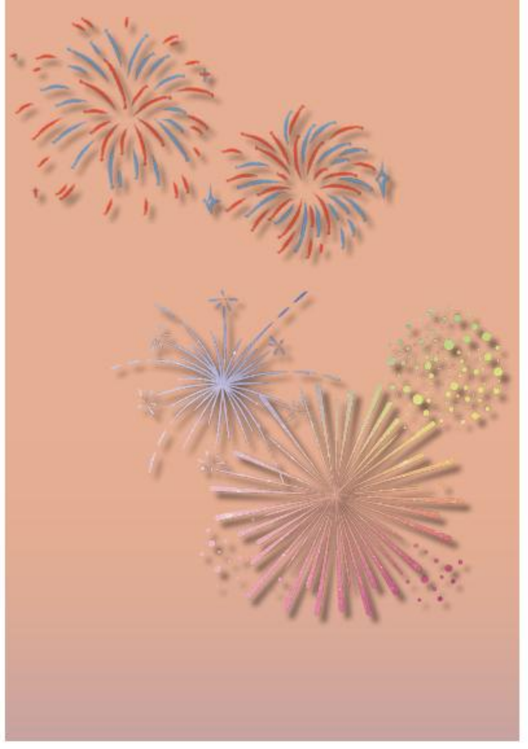
On the flip side of the offense, Bauer could show off his dual-threat ability in the run game against a defense that has allowed 970 rushing yards in four games. Senior running back John Gentry finished his game against the Bears with only two carries for four yards due to an injury he suffered early on. Gentry will seemingly be healthy for the team's first conference game, though, and could look to finally get over his three-yards-a-carry average. In his place, sophomore running back Thomas Ansley found his way to the end-zone for his first Skyhawks touchdown and the only touchdown scored in the Skyhawks matchup against the Bears. With Gentry battling a possible injury, Ansley should see an increase in workload.

The Skyhawks have struggled–no way around it–but this marks their first OVC-Big South conference game and could be the turning point this team needs.

On family weekend, the Skyhawks will host the Redhawks at Hardy M. Graham Stadium on Sept. 27, 2025 at 6 p.m.



Skyhawks offense lines up against the SEMO Redhawks in the OVC Championship at Hardy Graham stadium on Nov. 11, 2023 | ***Photo Credit / Sports information***


UT Matin Family Weekend
Football Game and Firework show
Kick off Saturday Sept. 27 at 6 p.m.
Fireworks to follow after the game

# Skyhawks face first potential 0-5 start since 2007

Nate Szarzynski | Pacer Staff

#8 quarterback Jase Bauer celebrates a touchdown with #22 tight end Drake Martinez and # 78 offensive lineman Preston Yarber at home against #14 SIU Salukis on Saturday, Sept. 13, 2025 ***(Photo Credit / Sports Information)***

The UT Martin Skyhawks' 42-10 blowout loss to the Missouri State Bears has them facing a potential 0-5 start for the first time in 18 years.

In 2007, which was Head Coach Jason Simpson's second season with UT Martin, the team began the year 0-6. The Skyhawks finished the year 4-7 and won the last three games of the season.

Now in 2025, Simpson's Skyhawks face similar adversity. The Skyhawks opened the season against three FBS opponents in the first four games and have yet to play their first conference game. Simpson, who played a role in assembling the team's schedule, took accountability for the team's difficult slate of games to open the season while meeting with media after the team's loss to the Southern Illinois Salukis.

"The schedule (is) my fault. I never should have let it happen. Sometimes you need a game to get your feet on the ground and get your confidence, but there's still no excuse," said Simpson.

Throughout the first four weeks of the 2025 collegiate football season, Simpson's Skyhawks have been outscored a total 148 points and allowed to 44 points scored.

With tough stretches and losing streaks, a dark cloud can encompass a locker room. However, that seems to not be the case for the Skyhawks as they keep their eyes towards the future. Redshirt sophomore long snapper Hayden King said that while the locker room is frustrated with how the team has played thus far, they know that the remaining games on the schedule are all that they can control.

"I'd say as a team we just know that these conference games are the ones that truly matter. Obviously those non-conference games can help you get in the playoffs like they did last season, but we have to continue to keep our eyes forward," said King.

Since the beginning of 2024 season, the Skyhawks held an 8-8 record, going 6-2 in conference play. With the remaining eight games being against conference opponents, there is real opportunity for the Skyhawks to turn the season around.

When a team is on a losing streak, there can be a loss of focus or failing fundamentals. This often leads to mistakes during the game. King said that the players and coaches are taking practice day by day, making sure they lift their teammates up and play the Skyhawk's brand of football.

"We've got to get back to playing clean football. We have not played clean football so far and we know we can win games when we do," said King.

# Student-Athlete Spotlight Volleyball: Riley Rushing

Connor Butts | Pacer Staff

This edition of Student Athlete Spotlights covers Beach Volleyball's very own Riley Rushing. She is a junior in her second season for the UT Martin Skyhawks. She is a major in Mass Media and Strategic Communication from Snowmass Village, Colorado. Rushing features an impressive background in Volleyball in her high school career at Aspen, where she earned 2019 all-conference second team, 2021 all-conference first team and all-state honorable mention. She was also named team MVP twice.

Rushing's love for beach volleyball came during her junior year of high school. At the boarding school in the south, she played and practiced beach volleyball in Port Saint Lucie, Florida and Orange Beach, Alabama.

"Playing beach volleyball, I fell in love with it and I love it so much more than indoor because you have so much more control over the game," said Rushing. She then found a beach volleyball club back home in Denver, Colorado and commuted four hours for three days of the week.

Rushing comes from a sports family with her mother, Caroline Rushing, having played tennis for the LSU Tigers and the Southern Miss Golden Eagles, while her grandfather, Allen Rushing, played basketball for the Furman Paladins.

Before the Skyhawks, Rushing played two seasons with the Tusculum University Pioneers. In her time, the Pioneers team went 11-14 in her freshman season and 21-12 in her sophomore season. In her sophomore year, the Pioneers team went 3-3 in the AVCA Small College Beach Championships. Rushing says her coaches and teammates at Tusculum helped prepare her for transferring to a high-competition school.

"I would say the coaches at Tusculum, they impacted me a lot. They ended up leaving, which is why I left as well. They were great coaches and taught me to run as quick as I could, passing the ball quicker and setting the ball quicker. I've transferred that to UT Martin, and I think that that's helped with a change in, like, level considering I went from D2 to D1," said Rushing. Rushing also commented on a close friend named Hannah who helped her confidence as a player.

"My old partner, her name was Hannah, we played together my last year at Tusculum and I still talk to her to this day, every day. She's amazing. And I think she helped me a lot as a player, just gain my confidence because. My freshman year, I was a very not confident player. Clearly that shows in my scores.

#1 senior Riley Rushing spikes ball against Chattanooga in 2025 OVC Championship at the UTC Beach Volleyball Facility on Apr. 25, 2025. | ***Photo Credit / Sports Information***